

# Hunting in Context

BY GEORGE E. CLARK

**Among those** who care about the outdoors, few activities arouse such disparate feelings as hunting. For many in the United States, hunting brings to mind time spent in nature, parents teaching their children, and sometimes, given patience and skill, extra meat for the freezer. For others, hunting evokes thoughts of endangered species, the international bushmeat crisis, the risk of injuries from firearms, and ethical issues regarding eating meat. The mention of hunting may also bring to mind gun violence not directly connected to hunting. (See <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/guns.htm> for statistics on gun-related crime in the United States; see <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00044112.htm> for a study of hunting-related injuries over a six-year period in the state of New York.)

From an environmental standpoint, if managed well, hunting can replace missing top predators in an ecosystem (<http://www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/deerhuntastool.asp>). Conversely, these top predators are themselves likely to be missing due to past hunting. Hunting can also be used to combat destructive invasive species such as the nutria, a ravenous rodent eating its way through wetlands in the United States, particularly in the Gulf Coast (<http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/experience/nutriacontrol/nutriacontrolprogram>).

Despite the division between the hunting and anti-hunting conservation communities, there is some common ground. Few on either side of the debate would dispute that overhunting, poaching, and unregulated trade in animal parts harm species and ecosystems and may even promote new vectors of disease transmission (see <http://www.bushmeat.org> and <http://www.zoo.cam.ac.uk/ioz/projects/bushmeat.htm>; on disease transmission, see <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/EID/vol11no12/04-0789.htm>).

Poaching of animals for illicit sales has been documented in the United States as well as abroad. For example, a series of joint law enforcement efforts in the past decade have documented "extensive illegal taking and trade in black bear parts that originated in Virginia, including Shenandoah National Park" (<http://www.dgif.state.va.us/newsroom/pr-010704-VIPER.html>; see also [http://www.appvoices.org/index.php?site/comments/black\\_bear\\_parts\\_in\\_the\\_blue\\_ridge](http://www.appvoices.org/index.php?site/comments/black_bear_parts_in_the_blue_ridge)).

Globalization drives poaching by providing access to international demand (for example, traditional medicines in Asia in the Virginia case, and London markets for African game in another: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/1390125.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/1390125.stm)).

Beyond opposition to poaching and trafficking, there are positive common interests as well. Most prominently, habitat preservation should provide some incentive for hunting and non-hunting conservationists to develop a deeper mutual understanding and work toward common goals. For that to happen, it is important to grasp the complex set of regulations, cultural norms, and commercial and political interests that surround hunting in the United States.

Environmental conservation has deep roots in hunting in the United States. Theodore Roosevelt, the president who began the National Wildlife Refuge program and designated 53 refuge sites ([http://www.fws.gov/refuges/centennial/pdf2/pelicanIsland\\_reffalt.pdf](http://www.fws.gov/refuges/centennial/pdf2/pelicanIsland_reffalt.pdf)), was an avid hunter (see, for example, *Through the Brazilian Wilderness*, his account of a hunting and collecting expedition for the American Museum of Natural

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History (<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015024018106>)). Aldo Leopold, one of the United States' most revered conservationists and the key lobbyist for the wilderness component of the National Forest system, was a professor of game management and hunted throughout his life. (See <http://www.wilderness.org/AboutUs/Leopold.cfm> and [http://www.aldoleopold.org/About/leopold\\_bio.htm](http://www.aldoleopold.org/About/leopold_bio.htm). An interview with biographer Marybeth Lorbiecki gives nuanced insight into Leopold's relationship with hunting: [http://forestry.about.com/cs/foresthstory1/a/al\\_leo\\_lorb2.htm](http://forestry.about.com/cs/foresthstory1/a/al_leo_lorb2.htm).) Many hunters today continue in the conservation tradition through the Izaak Walton League, an environmental organization with a strong hunting ethics component (<http://www.iwla.org/publications/ethics/huntcard.pdf>).

While hunting and shooting are express uses of many types of federal land in the United States ([http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/trails/shooting\\_mou.pdf](http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/trails/shooting_mou.pdf)), hunting is regulated at the state level. Therefore, there are 50 different sets of rules on what animals may be hunted how, when, and by whom. There is similar decentralization of regulation of who may possess firearms and use them to hunt. Given the

market for firearms to use in hunting, it should come as no surprise that one of the most prominent Web sites listing state hunting agencies (<http://www.huntinfo.org>) belongs to the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), a firearms industry trade association whose board members come from Glock, Smith & Wesson and other gun manufacturers. (Page 15 of the NSSF 2006 annual report <http://www.nssf.org/share/PDF/2006AnnualReview.pdf> has a complete list of board members.) NSSF is also one of the prime supporters ([http://www.sportsmenslink.org/about/partners/outdoor\\_industry.asp](http://www.sportsmenslink.org/about/partners/outdoor_industry.asp)) of the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus (<http://www.sportsmenslink.org/caucus/pdf/110thCaucusList.pdf>), a group of senators and representatives with an interest in hunting that commands a majority in each house of the U.S. Congress.

Meanwhile, the political power wielded by organizations such as the National Rifle Association (<http://www.nra.org>) has political candidates scrambling to be identified as hunters, even though press coverage does not necessarily turn out to be flattering (for example, George W. Bush and Ann Richards: <http://www.savethedoves.org/gwbush.html>; John Kerry: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A50527-2004Oct21.html>; and most recently Mitt Romney: <http://www.cnn.com/2007/POLITICS/04/05/romney.hunting.ap>). Dick

## **The hunting economy and lobby are a force to be reckoned with. The National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation puts consumer spending on hunting in the tens of billions of dollars.**

Cheney's accidental shooting of a campaign contributor during a quail hunt has also been widely reported (<http://www.cnn.com/2006/POLITICS/02/12/cheney>). Whether or not one supports hunting, the hunting economy and lobby are a force to be reckoned with. Hunting is big business, and the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation puts consumer spending on hunting in the tens of billions of dollars (<http://federalaid.fws.gov/surveys/surveys.html>).

Despite the role of businesses big and small, hunting is still an activity carried out by individuals and small groups, often close to home and often for the family table. For instance, the federal government maintains a formal subsistence hunting program in Alaska favoring local residents over tourists (<http://alaska.fws.gov/asm/index.cfm>). In the rural United States, many schools close for the opening days of deer season so that students may participate in the hunt (for example, see <http://summersville.k12.mo.us/Distcal.htm> and <http://www.frsd.k12.pa.us/Calendars/07distcalendar.htm>). This com-

munity setting for hunting would seem to be consistent with environmental movements that aim to bring consumers away from industrial and fast food production, such as bio regionalism (<http://bioregion.ucdavis.edu/who/biblio.html>), slow food (<http://www.slowfoodusa.org>), and farm shareholding, also known as community-supported agriculture (<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/csa/csa.shtml>).

Widely shared concerns about the (often illegal) misuse of hunting remain, and governments continue, more or less effectively, to combat the loss of species diversity due to hunting, habitat loss, and other factors. In the United States, endangered animals are protected by the Endangered Species Act (<http://www.fws.gov/endangered/whatwedo.html>). But the process of listing animals for protection remains uncertain; large, charismatic animals are favored in practice if not in principle; and to what extent the Endangered Species Act protects habitat is still being contested. Internationally, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna (CITES, <http://www.cites.org>) attempts to limit the negative effects of hunting by regulating or prohibiting the trade of listed species. Further, despite the niche of hunters in ecosystems with invasive species and missing top predators, animal welfare activists would argue that too little research is conducted on non-lethal means of animal population control, such as contraception (<http://www.nal.usda.gov/awic/pubs/SpayNeuter/wildlife.htm>).

Poverty is one driver of hunting behaviors that put negative pressures on ecosystems. Gerald Shively, an agriculture economist at Purdue University, has documented the impact of the variety of available economic opportunities on hunting behavior among residents of the Philippine island of Palawan (<http://www.philippinecockatoo.org/publications/hunting.pdf>). Overseas Development Institute researchers point out that understanding bushmeat as a source of income, protein, livelihood, and culture is a prerequisite to decreasing negative impacts on people and ecosystems ([http://www.odi-bushmeat.org/bushmeat\\_crisis\\_livelihoods.htm](http://www.odi-bushmeat.org/bushmeat_crisis_livelihoods.htm)).

Hunting in its varied forms in the United States remains a much beloved and a highly contentious practice. It has the potential for positive and negative ecosystem effects and even abuse. For their part, hunters who are also conservationists would do well to fight poaching and illegal trade in animal parts and to seize opportunities to increase ecological gains and decrease harms from hunting, including support for more effective anti-poaching policies. Non-hunting environmentalists would do well to reach out to hunters as partners in forms of outdoor recreation that both can enjoy as well as the advancement of other mutual policy interests.

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